

“How to Pray” – Christian Sanctification Study

This study references the book “Walking with God” by Richard Phillips, published by the Banner of Truth Trust.

I. *Introduction*

- READ I Peter 5:8 - “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”
- READ I Peter 4:7 – “The end of all things is near; therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.
- As we learn from the letter's opening greeting, the Apostle Peter, writing to Christians scattered throughout the ancient world, **exhorts God's people to be alert, clear-minded, and self-controlled.**
- Along with the command, the apostle provides his readers **specific reasons, or incentives, as to why they must be self-controlled.**
- **In Chapter 5:8, his concern is the “enemy.”** The evil one, the devil, is looking for just the right occasion to cause the Christian to fall into sin.
- **In chapter 4:7, we have another incentive to be self-controlled.** Why? Because the “end of all things is near.” This is a theme found often in the Apostles' writings and often directed to Christians so that when the Savior returns, **they will be found ready and waiting for his appearance.**
- Of course that was a frequent theme of the Lord Jesus himself. We have numerous references in the gospels of him describing the return of the son of man coming suddenly at an hour when most are not expecting him to come. **The emphasis is for Christians to WATCH, be ALERT, be READY!**
- But in chapter 4, verse 7, Peter gives us another reason to be clear-minded and self-controlled. **Why? so that they can pray!**
- Two weeks ago, we examined Titus 2 and the broad group of Christians the Apostle Paul exhorts to be self-controlled: young women, young men, old men, and church leaders (chapter 1).
- We also tried to define what scripture means by **self-control.** We stated that the common understanding of self-control is often regarded as a person's willpower and self-restraint—**in other words, as man-centered.**

- We tried to show that the New Testament's meaning is much broader than that. In fact, Galatians 5 states that self-control is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- In our definition, we used the example of the demonic in Mark 5, who was possessed by legions of demons and completely lacked self-control. Scripture teaches us he would cry out in screams and cut himself over and over again. However, by the grace of God, when he met the Lord Jesus Christ, he was healed! Upon meeting Christ, Scripture describes him in Mark 5 as "**clothed and in his right mind.**"
- We commented that the exact words used in Mark 5 for "**right mind**" in the original language is translated in many other references in the New Testament as self-control.
- The gist is that the Christian, who is self-controlled, has a certain wholeness or soundness about them; **they are not self-centered but Christ-centered.** **WHY? Because the Spirit of God is active in their lives.**
- It is easy to see why Peter links self-control to prayer and urges God's people to be self-controlled. When we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts and live in the Spirit (again, using the language of Galatians), prayer will always result. **It is as normal to an alive person as breathing is to a dead person.**
- Now, unfortunately, the reality is we all struggle with the battle against sin. As much as we desire to be self-controlled in all areas of our lives, and as much as we desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we fall short of what we want to be.
We do not have to be Christians very long to recognize Galatians 5:17 as a reality.
- **READ Galatians 5:17:** "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want"
- But God, in his great mercy, has given us a means for growing in this fruit of the Holy Spirit. This means is the subject of our study. **The means is PRAYER!**
- This week, we aim to study how to pray, **using Psalm 5 as a model and basis for discussion.**
- **Before we read Psalm 5, a disclaimer is in order.** In some ways, I question the appropriateness of the title "How to Pray"! Although scripture certainly provides us with many models for prayer and instructions for helping us pray, **we must keep in mind that true prayer is not so mechanical as just following an outline or a certain number of steps!**

- True prayer is a mystery in many ways. The truth is, we do not know how to pray as we should!
- **Romans 8:26**, “for we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”
- So, at best, we can use Psalm 5 as helpful, God-given instructions and pray that God will bless us so that each of us might grow in our prayer and praise of Him!
- **Please turn to Psalm 5. READ Psalm 5.**
- **Psalm 5 can be divided up into five practical areas**
 1. Verses 1 - 3 Show us the essence of prayer
 2. Verses 4 – 6 addresses the Chief Matter of Prayer
 3. Verse 7 deals with the vitally important necessity of dealing with Sin
 4. Verses 8 – 10 on petitioning or making requests to God.
 5. Verse 11-12 fruit of prayer, or the blessings that flow to the believer, namely joy and peace from Prayer.

II. The Essence of Prayer (The heart of it all, what is prayer?)

- I was reading this week about D. L. Moody, the American evangelist God greatly used in the late 1800s. In the 1880s, he was in Edinburgh, Scotland, and was asked one morning to speak to a room filled with children. To get their attention, he began with a question: "What is prayer?"
- The story goes he didn't expect an answer -- he was going to answer the question himself, but he was surprised that many hands shot up all over the room. He called on one young boy to give the answer, and the boy stood up and said in a strong voice: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." Moody responded, "Thank God, my boy, you were born in Scotland!"
- What is telling about that story is that, some 120 years later, if that same question were asked in the vast majority of homes, churches, or schools, be they in Scotland or the USA, one can only imagine the answers.
- Now, while the first couple of verses from Psalm 5 **DO NOT** give us a concise definition of prayer as we find in the catechism, we are taught very clearly and very simply what the essence of prayer is: **prayer is coming to God.**

“Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; I lay my requests before you in the morning and wait in expectation.”

- Now, you might think it is obvious that prayer is coming to God. Yet, if we know our own sinful hearts, we know that we are all prone to forget that when we pray, we communicate with the sovereign God of the universe.
- We often view prayer as a duty to accomplish each day and can find ourselves just going through the motions. Given our sinful hearts, I think it is fair to say that we can easily find ourselves thinking more about ourselves than God.
- **READ Phillips Page 82 “#1 Walking with God”**
- So, we do well if we, like David in Psalm 5, remind ourselves who we are. coming before our great God, “for to you I pray.”
- Along with reminding ourselves who we are coming to in prayer, we find another aspect of preparation early in Psalm 5. We see it in the language David uses in Verse 3
- “In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning, I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.”
- The phrase means to arrange carefully and is the same language used to describe the Hebrew priest carefully arranging the sacrifice on the altar for the morning offering each day.
- Leviticus 1:12 – “He (the priest) is to cut it (sacrifice) into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar.”
- Leviticus 6:12 – “The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning, the priest is to add firewood, arrange the burnt offering on the fire, and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it”.

- As the priest carefully arranged the sacrifice according to God's instructions, Psalm 5 indicates that David would arrange his requests with similar care and concern.
- In his exposition of Psalm 5, CH Spurgeon wrote: “Do we not miss very much of the sweetness and efficacy of prayer by a want of careful meditation before it? We should begin to pray before we kneel down and not cease when we rise up.
- So, there is a certain preparation that Psalm 5 demonstrates to us.
- **Question:** What practical way might we implement the suggestion to “arrange” our prayers? What should we arrange? **Answer:** A prayer guide or prayer log. This is one reason the Church Prayer Directory is a wonderful tool.
- Verse 3 also suggests that prayer should have a regular time in our lives: “In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice.”
- We are creatures of habit in many ways. Verse 3 suggests that the morning hours were David’s regular time for prayer. The important point here is that there is a consistent, day-in, day-out pattern. Many will find the morning hours the best time of day, with the fewest distractions. But perhaps for some, that is not possible. Sometimes, for mothers of young children, that is not doable. The key, though, is consistency, day in and day out.
- Perhaps more importantly, our heart attitude when we pray is also important. Verse 3 ends with, “**and wait in expectation**.”
- Do we trust God to hear our prayers and answer according to His will? The wonderful truth is that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can also say, like David in verse 2, “He is **my king and my God**.”
- This is the language of a covenant relationship. Those who belong to the Lord should pray with the same confidence!!
- Do you have any thoughts or comments about preparing for prayer before we move to the next section?

III. Chief Matter of Prayer

- In the next section of Psalm 5, verses 4 – 6, our author calls the chief matter of prayer.
 - ⁴ You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; the wicked cannot dwell with you.
 - ⁵ The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. ⁶ You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.
- **Question:** Does anyone recall what the author considers the chief matter of prayer to be from the book?
- **Answer: Adoration**
- **Question:** What does David praise God for in verses 4 through 6? **Answer:** God's holiness and hatred for sin.
- David is concerned for God's honor and glory. He recognizes God as a holy God, completely free from sin and evil, and a just God who will destroy evil. He adores God for who he is—for his righteousness and holiness!
- **Psalm 22:3 But thou art holy, O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel**
- Do we spend time dwelling on the holiness of God? What a blessing to do so when we can contrast that with so much evil in the world, indeed in our own hearts. Certainly, in so doing, we cannot help but adore and praise God!
- It is instructive that David still has not made a request to God. He intends to remind himself who God is and praise God for his holiness and hatred of evil.
- Do you struggle to know how to or what to praise for? The Word of God provides us with all we need to know about God so that we can praise him.
- I often read Psalm 145 because it teaches us how to praise God! “I will exalt you, my God, the King; I will praise your name forever and ever. Every day, I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever.
- The Psalmist in Psalm 145 goes into great detail about why God is worthy of praise. He reflects on his majesty, compassion, grace, eternity, and on and on.
- Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, reflect on the Lord Jesus Christ. Stir yourself up by praising God for all Christ means to you!

- So, along with coming to God, preparation, adoration, and praise are central to prayer.
- Thoughts or comments before the next section?

IV. Reckoning with Sin

- The next section of Psalm 5 is the vitally important matter of dealing with our sins. In verse 7, David says”

“But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.”

- “**But I.**” In verse 5, David claimed that sinners could not stand in the presence of God. In verse 6, he announced that God would destroy deceitful men, and then he said, **“But I, by your mercy, will come into your house.”**
- It is as if David realized that everything he said in verses 4 – 6 was true of his own heart as well! We all are sinners. We all, in one way or another, are deceitful. There is none righteous, no not one (as the scripture teaches elsewhere)
- It is as if David, reflecting on God’s holiness and the fact that the “wicked could not dwell with God” (verse 4), realizes he is also guilty of sin!
- **Question:** What is David’s confidence in Verse 7? **Answer:** The Mercy of God.
- The New American Standard reads, “But as for me, by your abundant **loving-kindness**, I will enter your house.
- Philips has this to say regarding this word translated mercy in the NIV and loving-kindness in the New American Standard.
- **See page 87 and read his quote.**
- **Question:** How do we understand that David is concerned about his sin by reading verse 7?
- **Answer:** “**I will bow down toward your holy temple.**” Where was the Temple? **The temple was not built until many years later**, but there was a tabernacle in which God dwelled, and the priest conducted their sacrifices.

- In David's day, God's people, by faith, considered the sacrifices as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice God would provide by sending the Savior (the Lord Jesus Christ) into the world to atone once and for all for sin.
- Is confession of sin a regular part of our prayer time? Do we allow known sin to go un-confessed and still anticipate hope to receive the blessings of a holy God?
- David had learned the value of confession at another time in his life. Turn to Psalm 32
- READ Psalm 32 1 - 5

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then, I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

- Thoughts or comments before the next section?

V. Making Requests of God

- In the next section of our outline of Psalm 5, verses 8 – 10, after first worshipping God and having confessed his great need for the mercy of God, we finally see David making requests to God. **READ 8-10**

⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies— make straight your way before me. ⁹ Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue, they speak deceit. ¹⁰ Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.

- What does he ask for? It is instructive that David prays to be led by God's righteousness. Knowing that David's own righteousness is imperfect.
- It is also interesting that even in his requests to see judgment on his enemies, he still concerns himself with God's honor and glory.
- In other words, even when making requests, his concern is still for the will of the Lord.

- In the scriptures, God invites us to pray and petition him for everything. He is our heavenly Father, and as such, he delights in our coming and asking. However, we should always be concerned about honoring him in our petitions.

VI. Joy and Peace from Prayer

- The final section of Psalm 5, verses 11 and 12, teaches us the great blessing of joy and peace God's people receive from prayer. READ verses 11 and 12.
- ¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them so those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.
- What a great passage! What blessings the believer receives! The joy and peace received are not dependent on specific petitions being answered! David is teaching us that joy simply comes from finding refuge from this evil world in God himself.
- It is this person, rejoicing in God Himself, who gladly can say the will of the Lord be done.
- Isn't this the great principle of Philippians chapter 4?
- READ Philippians 4:4 – 7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is nearby. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **What follows the prayer? Peace of God which.....**

- The question is, do we know in practical experience the joy and peace of God? Do we sense this peace from bringing our prayers and petitions before God? Perhaps there is more of a need for adoration of God? Perhaps more of a need for reflecting on who God is? Perhaps there is a need for confession of sin?
- As we end our study this morning, I'd like us to briefly turn back to the Old Testament book of I Samuel chapter 1. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel.*
- You may remember the birth of Samuel. His father, Elkanah, had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. Peninnah would often torment Hannah because of this fact. This family would travel to

Shiloh each year to worship and sacrifice to the Lord (1:3). Pick up the reading in chapter 1, verse 9. Stop at 1:18.

- “**Her face was no longer downcast**”.
- **Question: Now, why was Hannah no longer discouraged?**
- She still had no child and had to face her rival. Was it because she ate some food or received a good word from Eli, the priest?
- I suggest she prayed because **she knew the joy of the Lord from coming to him with her burden.**
- Brothers and Sisters, may we, by God’s love, also know something of this same joy and peace from our prayers.
- I Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”.
- Close with a prayer to the Sovereign Lord.